

Agenda item 7. Appendix A

Agriculture briefing Summer 2021

Australia Trade Deal

The NFU supports the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia but does have concerns with the Agreement in Principle reached in mid-June. We want a final deal that UK farmers can welcome with confidence. It is vital that any FTA is balanced, particularly when we are negotiating with an economy such as Australia's which is a global leader in agricultural exports, while at the same time representing a much smaller market opportunity for our own exports. We are therefore asking for a FTA which puts in some safeguards and reviews for sensitive sectors, as is the case with the excellent deal the government agreed with Japan last year. Beef, lamb and sugar sectors are particularly sensitive, given the differential in scales and costs of production with Australia. Australia is the world's biggest beef exporter in 2019 (by value) and second largest (behind Brazil) in volume terms. Australia is the largest exporter of sheep in the world and their cost of production in the sheep sector is around 65% lower than a UK producer. Australia exports 80-85% of their sugar cane crop. It is the second largest export crop for Australia after wheat. Australian sugar producers are permitted to use 25 active substances that have been banned for any use in the UK due to environmental risks. A tariff-free, quota-free access trade deal with Australia will mean that homegrown sugar growers are not competing on a level playing field with their Australian counterparts.

We remain concerned that the UK could be importing goods which are produced in ways which would be illegal here. For example, there differences in animal welfare standards. An Australian cow can be transported for two days, with no rest break and no water. This is illegal in Britain as is the practice of 'mulesing' lambs which would be regarded as unacceptable here. The quota volumes during the phase have been agreed, however the way in which the quotas are managed can still have a significant effect on the way in which the increasing volumes impacts the UK market. The NFU's overriding objective for managing our sensitive beef, lamb and sugar sectors during the phase out period is to ensure this is managed in a way that minimises the greatest disruption to domestic markets and upholds UK standards of animal welfare, environmental and food safety standards. This can be done by administering the quotas in a way that respects the need for a period of adjustment and ensures that UK farmers are not faced with unsustainable levels of imports that cause significant disruption, either in terms of the volume of product sent by Australian exporters, or the value received by UK farmers for their domestic products here in the UK.

By granting unrestricted market access through zero tariffs and quotas, the UK government is seriously reducing the value of the UK market in terms of negotiating capital and setting a precedent for future trade deals. Farmers are keen to work with government to increase the UK farming industry's international competitiveness and we are calling on the government to develop a robust strategy to realise this ambition. However, given that such an ambitious strategy is not yet in place from the government, it would seem sensible to have effective safeguards in place.









LEGAL FARMING STANDARDS COMPARED

The Red Tractor logo means food can be traced back to British farms and produced to standards you can trust.

FARM STANDARDS



HORMONE-FED BEEF	Legal		Banned
HOT BRANDING	Legal		Banned
SOW STALLS	Legal		Banned
MANAGEMENT OF SOILED WOOL	Mulesing - cutting skin away (Only Victoria state requires pain relief)		Dagging – trimming wool only to prevent soiling
PARAQUAT (WEED KILLER)	Legal		Banned toxic to animals and humans
SLAUGHTERHOUSE CCTV	Not required		Mandatory
TRANSPORT TIMES	Up to 24 hours		Up to 8 hours on conventional transport

Trade – rest of the world: NZ: New Zealand represents a market of less than 5 million people, compared to the UK population of over 66 million people. NZ is a major agricultural exporter and as a result represents direct competition for UK farmers. The DIT scoping assessment published alongside the UK negotiating mandate finds that a UK-NZ FTA will have very limited potential gains for the UK economy and the estimated gain for UK GDP is 0.00% (full tariff removal and 50% of NTB costs addressed). Under this scenario imports are expected to increase by 40.3% and exports to increase by 7.3%.

Beef: NZ exports over 90% of the beef they produce. Despite falling outside of the top 10 for global cattle numbers they are consistently in the top 5 beef exporters in the world. They export the majority of their beef frozen which would be very attractive to UK food service sector which is much more price sensitive and driven by margin. In normal circumstances, what UK consumers spend on eating out is almost equal to that spent on food and drink in retail. This is a concern as there is much less transparency or information about origin available to consumers.

Lamb: NZ exports around 98% of the lamb they produce. New Zealand is the second largest exporter of sheep meat in the world, (second to Australia) and in 2018 controlled 41% of the global trade. The cost of production of lamb in NZ is on average 63% lower than in the UK. Currently only c.30% of the retail market committed to sourcing British (once Waitrose transition). Whilst we welcome these commitments there is still a significant amount of NZ used within retail (especially as some of these

commitments only extend to fresh product) and insight suggests the sourcing of NZ lamb in UK food service is widespread at all price points.

Dairy: NZ is a global powerhouse in dairy production. It has a self-sufficiency of c. 880% in dairy and exports 95% of what they produce. The cost of producing milk in NZ is 25% lower than in the UK. The supply chains in NZ are set up to be flexible and can maximise their returns for whichever product the global market demands. In comparison, in the UK although progress is being made, farmers are often limited to the extent to which they can manage their own price volatility and are often trapped in contracts which are not fair.

Fruit: NZ is a major global exporter of apples. The prices of NZ apples are often \$400-500/t cheaper than in the UK so it would be cost effective for UK importers to import NZ apples and due to improvements in storage technology these could be stored well into the UK season. They grow many of the same varieties as we do e.g. Cox and have access to more labour and more crop protection products which, as FAO data shows, makes them more productive.

CPTPP (Trans-pacific countries (11))

The NFU believes that the CPTPP could provide opportunities for British farmers to sell more great British food overseas. In particular, there is potential for the beef, sheep and dairy sectors to grow exports in South-East Asia where food safety is a key consumer concern. Given the UK's demonstratable safe, traceable, and audited food supply chains, 'Brand Britain' could win valuable market share if access is provided. However, the CPTPP also includes major agricultural exporting countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada and the NFU is concerned that in becoming a partner in the CPTPP, the UK Government will be asked to increase market access for sensitive agricultural products above and beyond that granted via bilateral agreements with those nations. Any agreement should be balanced, should offer reciprocal benefit and safeguards should be put in place for our most sensitive sectors. The NFU believes that to enable and support a thriving British agriculture sector it is crucial that the UK's future trade policy respects domestic production standards. To do otherwise would contradict the government's own stated commitment and would risk compromising our high animal welfare and environmental standards and would undermine British farmers

EU / UK: EU remains the most valuable international trading partner for UK agriculture. NFU welcomes the TCA which provides for tariff free and quota free trade but believes more should be done to futureproof and build on this. The latest FDF export snapshot shows exports to the EU fell by 47% compared to Q1 2020 and by 55% compared to Q1 2019. We believe the UK should make the most of our unique starting point and look for a pragmatic solution with the EU which allows trade to flow more freely. For example, the Parties could seek to agree a joint animal, plant health and food safety (SPS) agreement which would reduce the number of checks and amount of paperwork required at the border as well as work to smooth GB-NI trade. Some sectors of agriculture are affected by bans or practical limitations imposed by the EU on our trade. For example, GB farmers can no longer export seed potatoes to the EU, and the trade in high value breeding stock, has effectively stopped to the continent as there are no Border Control Posts available to accept large farm animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs and goats on the north European coast. Efforts should be prioritised to resolve these issues and the affected sectors should be able to access appropriate forms of support. We ask the government to continue to engage proactively and constructively with the EU to seek easements for trade in agri-food goods and to work with us to identify ways to help affected farmers.

Ag Transition - ELMS (Environmental Land Management Schemes)

Leaving the EU provides a historic opportunity to redesign agri-environment schemes in a form that suits British farms, for the first time since their introduction in the UK in 1987. Defra's proposals for an Environmental Land Management Scheme, or ELMS, are central to the transition away from Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) direct support to future support through the "public money for public goods" approach. The BPS phase out should be in step with Defra's capability to spend the released funds on fully accessible schemes for farmers to help a smooth business transition to a post CAP world and matched to the competitive impacts of new trade deals signed in the coming years. This future agri-environmental scheme must work for all farm businesses in England, embracing their rich diversity and inspiring our farming and growing community to engage with the scheme at scale.

The NFU along with a number of other organisations has developed detailed proposals for what the future of ELMS should look like in the form of the 'Sustainable Food & Farming Scheme' (or SFFS) which should provide the foundation on which to build business capability and environmental performance. SFFS/ELM should provide a single funding/delivery point for a range of environmental interests: wildlife conservation, building more productive farm businesses; achieving net zero; improving animal health and welfare; sustainable use of pesticides (IPM); protecting cultural and historic features; and, helping to manage flooding.

Farming Investment Fund

As Direct Payments are phasing out, the Farming Investment Fund is one of the ways through which Defra will look to support profitability and environmental goods. The Farming Investment Fund is divided in two. One part of the fund awards grants of lower value and the other part awards grants of higher value. The lower value investment part of the fund is called the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund. The higher value investment part of the fund is called the Farming Transformation Fund. We want Defra to commit to the spending of 9% of the ATP Budget on the Farm Investment Fund with a commitment to assist in building more productive and resilient farm businesses. We also want to see to make sure two further funds: the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) and the Farm Transformation Fund (FTF) are launched and fully funded within the 2021 financial year with a range of equipment that provides farmers with tangible productivity gains whilst delivering for the environment and contribution towards net zero targets

We believe the grant threshold on the FETF should be lowered to enable more farmers to access funding. We are also lobbying for the lowering the grant threshold of the Farm Transformation Fund so that it aligns with the upper limit of the FETF. We are pressing for Defra to take regular feedback on the success of the schemes so there is continual improvement in future grant rounds. And keeping the scheme(s) under review to encompass new technologies as they become available.

Net Zero and Climate Change

In 2019, the NFU committed to an ambition for 'net zero' contribution to climate change across the whole of agricultural production by 2040; in other words, to produce the most climate-friendly food in the world. Farmers cannot do this on our own. We are looking to Government and other stakeholders to act with us and help us deliver against this ambition, through concerted and robust action and upholding the principles of a fair and just low-carbon transition for the rural economy.

Achieving Net Zero requires that we boost our resource efficiency (using less to produce more) but this need concerted action by Defra but also BEIS, the Treasury and other government departments including: Further development phases of the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) must specifically

target net zero. Upgraded infrastructure in rural areas is vital for new technologies including electric vehicle charging points, fast tracking of electric grid network connections to enable decentralised renewable energy generation and battery storage and building modernisation. Development of a new GHG foot printing standard that better reflects the diversity of UK farming systems, captures on-farm sources and sinks, and enables product and farm business calculations. Net zero policy should actively incentivise the conservation of critically important carbon resources in soils, wooded landscape and semi-natural habitats, as well as their enhancement.

Significant upgrade of the LULUCF (Land Use Land Use Change and Forestry) inventory so that it much better reflects the current situation and can capture progress so that every tree counts. The UK needs to develop a strong domestic bioenergy base in the short term, alongside expansion of other land-based renewables. The Government's forthcoming Bioenergy Strategy must build upon the industry-led strategy of 2019, accompanied by a clear carbon price trajectory and multiple demonstration projects of greenhouse gas removals at different scales.

Accelerated use of bio-based materials in construction and industry, implementing the Government's Bioeconomy Strategy of 2018, as well as visible support from the Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for novel building and insulation materials like hemp fibre and sheep's wool. Further support R&D and widespread demonstration of promising new greenhouse gas removal methods for nationwide deployment in the near future, such as landspreading of biochar and enhanced weathering minerals. The definition of 'farming' should be widened to include climate change mitigation for the purposes of Income Tax, Capital Gains Tax, and Inheritance Tax. The current rules would unfairly penalise family farmers who share the Government's ambitions on areas such as clean energy production, tree planting or creating wetlands.

Supply Chains

We want to see a marketplace that delivers a fair and functioning supply chain, and not pass risk onto farmers through retrospective deductions, delays in payments, specification changes, unfair and undeliverable contracts. To achieve our aims, we need a comprehensive plan to address unfair trading practices and improve transparency in the supply chain. It is critical therefore Government established Overarching Principles of Fair Dealing governing all agri-food buyers across all sectors. These principles will set a base line on how all buyers trade with farmers and growers. Where there is a need to go further to address sector specific unfair trading practices, we wish for the Secretary of State to use the powers within the Agriculture Act to bring forward legislation to address these.

Public Procurement Policy

The NFU believes a renewed approach to public procurement would enable more inward investment in our sector, its standards, and values. It will provide an opportunity for citizens to eat healthier, more environmentally sustainable food produced by British producers and suppliers, while ensuring public money is spent on protecting public values. We believe it is in both the public and the producers' interests that our public sector utilises our world-leading food and farming industry to deliver safe, traceable, affordable, nutritious food. At a time of acute economic insecurity, we believe that the government's public procurement policies create an opportunity to utilise public spending to invest in the national economy, the environment, and the health of consumers and communities who supply the country's food. Public sector food procurement can reconnect people with their diets and ensure everyone can eat great British food, regardless of where they live or their

income. Serving more local British food in our hospitals, our schools would be a huge vote of support for British food and farming.

Government must be ambitious in its commitment to sourcing from the UK food and drink sector by promoting and driving local, seasonal and fresh food purchasing. Government must champion British food production across all sectors. Government's own purchasing decisions must reinforce and uphold British food standards and the Government Buying Standards must protect the sector from lower standard imports. Government must drive food procurement away from simply purchasing on price alone by reinforcing the principles of the Balanced Scorecard and embedding the importance of the "social value" of food. Furthermore, through the balanced scorecard, the public sector must be driven to support Red Tractor assured products, enabling high quality, safe, traceable food is served with confidence. Government must drive accountability within the sector and enable the capture and utilisation of data to drive innovations within supply chains. Government spend must be transparent and accountable to its strategic objectives.

Future public procurement policy must consider wider government and agricultural policy commitments. For example, how will the GBSF seek to interact with future Environmental Land Management schemes, assurance schemes and industry pledges such as the NFU's commitment to Net Zero by 2040. The NFU believes the Government has a key opportunity through their review of the Government Buying Standards (GBSF) to deliver significant benefit to consumers and food producers within the supply chain.

Access to Labour

70,000 seasonal workers are required annually within the Horticulture sector and around 8,500 for the poultry sector. The expansion of the Seasonal Worker Pilot to 30,000 visas was welcome news in December 2020. However, this is only applicable to edible horticulture businesses and not a permanent solution. Farmers and growers need urgent confirmation of a permanent scheme for 2022 and beyond. A permanent scheme must include ornamental and poultry producers, as these sectors have struggled to secure the seasonal workers they need, despite best efforts to recruit, and visas numbers must reflect this.

In pre-Covid19 times, ONS data has shown up to 99% of the horticulture workforce to be of migrant origin. In 2020, even with the unique circumstances over the past year (with COVID-19, furloughed workers and combined industry and government efforts to secure UK based workers), only 6% of the seasonal horticultural workforce came from the resident labour market. There is therefore a clear and critical need, for a permanent seasonal worker scheme. The NFU has worked closely with the Department for Work and Pensions and with local job centres to identify British workers with the right skills and attributes for these seasonal roles. However, with increasing competition for UK workers across the economy, the temporary nature of farm roles and their rural locations, it will be very difficult to attract enough domestic workers to fill the ever-growing seasonal worker gap. The decision to exclude entry level permanent roles from the points-based immigration system should be revisited given that skill level and value to society are not necessarily the same thing. Strategically targeted entry level pathways should be put in place to fill key entry level shortages in critical sectors like agriculture and horticulture. For example, government could: exempt evidenced entry level shortage roles in strategic sectors like Agriculture and Horticulture from the skills threshold; or make provision for a temporary work visa of at least two years to allow workers to come into the UK to carry out work in entry level shortage roles within strategically important sectors.

In addition, the NFU is also asking that the Government to: Make the process of applying for and being a sponsor under the PBS as user friendly as possible for businesses, including SME's and microbusinesses; Reduce the cost of the new immigration system for workers and employers; and, ensure sector skills shortages are recognised on the Shortage Occupation List. The Youth Mobility Scheme should be expanded to EEA countries, with any cap on migrant numbers set at a workable level and ideally, alternative mechanisms for covering maintenance created. Review the composition of the MAC so that it has business representation within its makeup in a similar way to the Low Pay Commission. Set the required level of English as Basic English to reflect the ability for fluency to be built through emersion over time. Allow accommodation and other quantifiable benefits within the wider remuneration package to count towards the salary threshold for the points-based system. Reform the immigration health surcharge payable by migrants in respect of the NHS, so that it is payable in instalments.

Agriculture and the Tax System

The definition of 'agriculture' for tax purposes should be updated, as noted in the Committee on Climate Change report 'Land Use: Policies for a Net Zero UK' to reflect the role of farming and farmland in climate mitigation. At present tax definitions act as a barrier to the Government's environmental ambitions should farmland be put into exclusively environmental use on either a temporary or permanent basis. At the very least we would recommend extending Inheritance Tax Agricultural Property Relief so that it is available for any land under a future Environmental Land Management Scheme. The super deduction, a 2-year temporary relief providing unlimited upfront tax relief on 130% of the cost of plant and machinery is only available to limited companies. This is extremely disappointing for the vast majority of farms, which tend to operate as family partnerships. This is despite being in a period when significant farm investment in new technologies is likely to be required to drive productivity and competitiveness.

Another form of relief, the Annual Investment Allowance, does currently provide unincorporated businesses with upfront relief on the first £1m of expenditure on plant and machinery. However, this is set to reduce to just the first £200,000 of expenditure from 1 January 2022. It is essential that the temporary £1m Annual Investment Allowance limit remains in place for at least a further 3 years, if not permanently, to incentivise and enable such investment. Structures and Buildings Allowance now provides relief at 3% per annum on the cost of buildings and other infrastructure. However, as farmers consider their future business models, and the need for more efficient, lower emission, replacement buildings and infrastructure, we call for the Annual Investment Allowance to be expanded to the cost of buildings and infrastructure used in a trade as well as to plant and machinery. This would incentivise both short and long-term farm business investment where the upfront cost of longer-term investment is often more difficult to justify, particularly in such uncertain times.

Sustainable growth and productivity

Driving productivity, especially resource use efficiency, is good for business and good for environmental sustainability. Driving the efficiency with which the industry uses crop nutrients, feed and water helps reduce the footprint of production. However, the market doesn't always reward such activity. To deliver comprehensive productivity growth a strong government and industry partnership is needed to ensure: Enabling policy / regulation is smart; farmers are rewarded for goods / services the market won't pay for and; collaborative efforts of the industry e.g. AHDB, Producer Organisations, are effective.

Producer Organisations ('PO') in the UK have helped deliver significant productivity gains. For example, strawberry growers have doubled yields since the introduction of the PO scheme by investing in new varieties, production systems, mechanisation, storage and more. Government should develop a collaborative and well funded horticulture productivity scheme post-Brexit.

Investment in productivity gains is a long-term commitment and businesses have to be able to embrace short term weather/market volatility to be able to realise longstanding aims. Science and technology have a huge role to play in driving efficiency – whether that is through data driven connectivity, access to new breeding technologies or automation. The government should introduce a cohesive Plant Health Strategy, which includes robust biosecurity, support for IPM and novel breeding techniques, and science and risk-based pesticides regulation that protects the environment and the public, while also effectively supporting productive and competitive agriculture and horticulture.

Having left the EU, government must ensure its autonomous regulatory regime for pesticides is commercially viable, enabling GB registration of necessary crop protection tools, including biopesticides, safer, more effective and low risk products, novel and existing pesticides, and basic substances. Fit-for-purpose gene editing regulation will help address pest and disease pressures in sugar beet and allow a more efficient use of resources, enabling sugar beet growers to farm sustainably, providing the potential to make the crop more resilient to the virus yellows disease, and thus making the crop economically viable. The productivity and environmental benefits that could be offered by concerted support from the government for novel breeding techniques are significant and more work must be done in Defra to support a coherent policy.

Increased electrification is a key driver of new and more efficient technology and farming systems in agriculture, enhancing productivity growth through the improved precision and efficiency delivered by indoor production systems, robotics and electric agricultural machinery. Upgrading the rural electric network is also essential for the wider rural economy and diversified farm enterprises such as farm shops, tourism and business centres. The NFU is concerned that rural areas may get left behind in the accelerating transition to electric vehicles, as it has been for digital infrastructure. We need support for public-access electric vehicle (EV) charging facilities in farm shops and rural business units, as well as strategic investment and attractive grant funding for community EV charging hubs hosted by farms that adjoin villages and can 'lend' some of their 3-phase power supply. Farmers should be supported by government and the banks to have access to appropriate sources of finance to support business productivity and investment. A consistent approach across the financial sector would be welcome.

Planning Policy

The government's new planning white paper has the potential to contribute to increased productivity by removing some of the existing bureaucratic barriers to development. But a zonal system that designates rural areas as protection zones for preservation, risks creating a landscape in aspic with fewer and more costly development opportunities. How would this zonation deliver for the rural economy and farm businesses: on-farm diversification, affordable housing, updated farm buildings and operations and digital services? Poultry meat and egg production has increased significantly in the UK over recent years. During the Covid-19 crisis, some UK retailers had to import EU eggs to keep up with demand and so we must strengthen domestic supply. To enable the sector to grow, we need planning policies that give certainty to applicants, that enable prompt and timely decisions to be made and that are not hijacked by local interest groups delaying the legitimate process and adding significant cost to the applicant.

Indeed, some councils have now put a halt on any poultry applications. With retailers and food services companies going cage-free by 2025, farmers will need to replace that volume (circa 13m hens) in non-cage systems – we will need to reduce the obstacle thrown up by planning challenges to achieve this.

To enable the sector to grow, we need planning policies that give certainty to applicants, that enable prompt and timely decisions to be made and that are not hijacked by local interest groups delaying the legitimate process and adding significant cost to the applicant. Indeed, some councils have now put a halt on any poultry applications. While a move to online platforms may provide for greater transparency and streamlining of processes, many agricultural businesses have poor levels of digital connectivity. Safeguards are required to ensure the ability of those with limited or no internet access to interact with the planning system is preserved. As such, it is critical to improve democracy in the planning process at national and local level and ensure those farmers who are tenants, own farmland and live in communities get a fair voice in the process.

Planning fees are a significant cost for farmers, particularly with the increased environmental requirements that are put on applicants such as ammonia scrubbers on poultry houses. The requirements for environmental 'net gain' contained in the Environment Bill risk a perverse increase in the cost of environmental improvements where these require development consent. The Environment Bill must also ensure that where compulsory purchase powers are used to acquire land for a development which has gone through the normal planning process, land required for biodiversity offsetting cannot be acquired through compulsory purchase. This will minimise the impact on landowners.

Investing in Water Infrastructure and flooding

Water is an essential component of food production and the NFU supports policies that acknowledge this, as well as linking food security to water security. The dual problems of drought and flooding need a comprehensive suite of measures to manage water at a national level. This will require significant infrastructure investment to move water from areas of plenty to areas of need supported by increased inter-agency working. The government must encourage long term, multi-sector collaborative plans for managing water scarcity and flooding events that link together the management of 'too much' and 'not enough' water. ELMs must be designed to reward farmers reasonably for taking part in flood management. Deliver maximum and timely flexibility in the application of water abstraction rules to avoid wasting water that might otherwise run out to sea. For example, farmers should be permitted to abstract water during 'flash' high river flow events.

Ensure that international trade talks, acknowledges drought risk and water scarcity as a global challenge. Since food imports could become increasingly vulnerable, we must recognise the comparative advantage of British agriculture in delivering national food security and environmental benefits. The NFU has developed an Integrated Water Management Strategy (IWMS). This focuses on how farmers can best improve their resilience to water-related risks as well as proposing constructive ideas about how our resources should be managed in a holistic way. Farmers and growers need to be at the heart of future flood management policy and properly rewarded for their role in nature-based solutions to flooding. ELMs design must acknowledge this. With wetter winters, drier summers and huge geographical disparities across the country, the UK must invest to ensure long term consistency of supply. This will require significant and strategic investment in water management across the country.

On farm water-storage reservoirs should be encouraged by removing blockages in the planning and licensing regulations. In these plans, the responsibility to carry out and recover from natural flood solutions, such as intentionally flooding farmland, cannot lie solely with the farmer and payments made must be fair and reasonable and take into account the real costs incurred by providing that public good.

Rural Broadband

Digital connectivity in rural areas is acting as a constraint against productivity improvement and diversification for farm businesses. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the critical role of digital access for accelerating rural business opportunities and resilience as well as helping to offset some of the isolation experienced by those in rural communities. The Shared Rural Network is a welcome step to increase mobile connectivity, but more must be done to improve digital access and skills. The NFU conducts an annual broadband survey of our members, and the recent figures showed that 11% of farmers had no indoor mobile phone signal, and 32% of farmers have download speeds of 2Mbps or less. An Ofcom report found that by the end of 2019, 67% of all UK broadband connections were superfast, compared to 20% of our surveyed members.

The Government is aware of the challenges faced by rural areas and has pledged to deliver 85% nationwide gigabit-capable broadband coverage by 2025. This target has recently been downgraded from the initial pledge of nationwide coverage by 2025. Whilst this new target may be seen as being more realistic, given the capacity constraints (e.g. the lack of available labour to deploy the gigabit network), it will mean that the remaining 15%, which will be predominantly rural areas, will still have no access to effective broadband. In order to help support rural communities get access to broadband, we are asking for the Shared Rural Network to remain a priority and to be entirely complete by 2025. This is so that all communities can have access to a good mobile signal, which can also be used for mobile broadband as a working solution while communities wait for fibre broadband. We also want all government broadband schemes to offer all types of broadband and not just fibre. Fibre can often be extremely expensive and often impractical to get to rural locations. There are solutions that are rural-proofed including mobile broadband or fixed wireless broadband which can offer decent broadband speeds and are not as cost intensive to install as fibre. This will also help the government achieve the goal of 85% gigabit capable coverage by 2025 without rural areas having to be left behind.